

# Trade Center Bombing Seek 'Clarity of Motive'

o Ryder employees, had arrived  
ck up the van in a red GM sedan  
accompanied by a companion.  
er officials said that roughly two  
s after the explosion, Salameh  
ared at the office and claimed  
van had been stolen the night  
re. He asked for his \$400 dam-  
deposit, but was told he must  
file a police report.

Salameh's name was already in the  
s files. In 1990 he had demon-  
ed publicly on behalf of El-Say-  
Nosair, an Islamic firebrand who  
been charged with, and acquitted  
he 1991 slaying of Jewish De-  
e League founder Meir Kahane.  
Salameh had visited Nosair at the  
prison in Attica, N.Y., where he  
serving a sentence on lesser  
ges.

Salameh gave investigators a par-  
ar suspect to consider, and, as  
ortant, drew their attention to a  
ip of activists who orbited  
ugh the larger Islamic commu-  
in New York and New Jersey  
attended the Abu Bakr mosque  
Brooklyn and the Al-Salam  
que in Jersey City. Rahman had  
ched at both mosques.

he FBI had not previously con-  
red these activists to be terror-  
merely passionate militants. Yet  
FBI had access to intelligence  
mation about them gathered as  
esult of at least three occur-  
es: the prosecution of Nosair;  
emergence of Rahman as a pres-  
e in the New Jersey-New York  
mic community; and the 1991  
der of Mustafa Shalabi.

he Nosair trial was a watershed  
it among Middle Eastern mili-  
s in New York. Kahane, a hero to  
y Jewish radicals, was viewed as  
mbol of Zionist oppression to Is-  
ic radicals. During the trial, the  
l groups staged demonstrations,  
on opposite sides of the court-

ment blames the Islamic Group for a  
series of bombings and murders,  
most especially the assassination of  
Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in  
1981.

Egyptian security forces are en-  
gaged in a massive, nationwide  
crackdown aimed at fundamentalist  
militants, including members of the  
Islamic Group. The government has  
jailed 700 suspected extremists in  
response to a wave of violence that  
has left nearly 150 people dead, at  
the hands of either police or extrem-  
ists.

Before he emigrated to the United  
States, Rahman was acquitted of in-  
volvement in Sadat's death, but an  
FBI intelligence briefing during the  
Persian Gulf War persuaded at least  
one senior official to believe that he  
posed a potentially serious threat  
from his new base in New Jersey.

When Rahman arrived in the Unit-  
ed States, Shalabi found him a re-  
sidence. Thereafter, they raised funds  
for the Afghan resistance, but ulti-  
mately had a falling out, according to  
published statements by several as-  
sociates. In March 1991, Shalabi was  
found dead in his Brooklyn home,  
shot and knifed. There have been no  
arrests.

In addition, five months before the  
trade center bombing, about 20  
members of the two mosques who  
attended Nosair's trial or visited him  
at Attica were subpoenaed by a fed-  
eral grand jury, according to the  
New York Times. Ahmed A. Satta, a  
postal worker, told the Times that  
FBI agents grilled him about Nosair,  
Shalabi and Rahman.

To officials, then, the circumstan-  
tial clues being gathered by agents in  
New Jersey seemed to fit into a larg-  
er context. For example, Salameh's  
New York state driver's license listed  
his residence as 57 Prospect Park,  
S.W. Brooklyn—the home of Ibrahim

**MOHAMMAD  
SALAMEH, 25**  
Jordanian.  
Jersey City, N.J.,  
handyman  
arrested March  
4. Indicted in the  
bombing.



**BILAL ALKAISI, 26**  
Jordanian.  
New York area  
resident arrested  
March 25.  
Charged with  
aiding and  
abetting the  
bombing.



**NIDAL AYYAD, 25**  
Kuwaiti.  
Maplewood, N.J.,  
chemical engineer  
arrested  
March 10.  
Indicted in the  
bombing.



**IBRAHIM  
ELGABROWN, 42**  
Held Iraqi pass-  
port. Brooklyn  
contractor ar-  
rested March 4.  
Charged with  
obstruction and  
possessing fraud-  
ulent passports.



**MAHMUD  
ABOUHALIMA, 33**  
Egyptian. Wood-  
bridge, N.J., cab  
driver arrested in  
Egypt and brought  
to the U.S. March  
24. Indicted in  
the bombing.



**RAMZI AHMED  
YUSEF, 25**  
Jersey City, N.J.,  
resident who  
reportedly fled the  
country. Indicted  
in the bombing.



SOURCE: News services and staff reports

—Compiled by Barbara J. Saffir

office, agents arrested him. In his  
pockets, they found the business card  
of Nidal Ayyad, 25, a chemical engi-  
neer.

Eventually, the FBI executed at  
least 10 search warrants in New Jer-  
sey.

Agents found evidence connecting  
Salameh to a rental unit at the Space  
Station Storage facility in Jersey  
City. Employees identified Salameh  
as the man who rented a shed in No-  
vember under the name "Kamal Ibra-  
ham."

Upon searching this unit March 5,  
agents discovered several hundred  
pounds of chemicals that, if properly  
combined and triggered with a small  
explosive, could produce a powerful  
blast. They also discovered that the  
chemicals—hundreds of pounds of  
urea and nitric acid—were purchased  
in November by "Kamal Ibrahim."

Storage facility employees told the  
FBI that the day before the bombing  
they saw a man they believe was

Ayyad's office phone. Agents learned  
that Salameh and Ayyad had a joint  
account at a local bank. They discov-  
ered that on Feb. 15 Ayyad had  
rented from National Car Rental the  
same type of car that Salameh ar-  
rived in at the Ryder van rental of-  
fice. Moreover, "Salameh" was listed  
as an additional driver on the rental  
car. A witness from the Ryder office  
identified Ayyad as the same man  
who accompanied Salameh when he  
rented the van.

On March 10 agents descended on  
Ayyad's first-floor apartment at 60  
Boyden Ave., Maplewood, N.J. In-  
side, they found what a prosecutor  
later described as a modified timing  
mechanism that an explosives expert  
described as a time delay firing sys-  
tem. Ayyad was carrying an Amer-  
ican Express card in the name of Bilal  
Alkai. At least one witness told the  
FBI that the day before the bombing  
he accompanied Salameh to the storage shed  
"on several occasions."

purported involvement with the Af-  
ghan resistance. Associates said  
Abouhalima traveled to Pakistan for  
military training and that he was a  
follower of Rahman and sometimes  
served as his driver. Rahman has dis-  
puted this claim and publicly de-  
nounced the bombing.)

Aside from these characterizations  
of Abouhalima—which will likely be  
contested in court—there has been  
no public disclosure of what direct  
evidence, if any, connects him to the  
bombing. He was eventually returned  
to New York. U.S. officials have re-  
fused to discuss their knowledge of  
the arrest or treatment of Abou-  
halima.

For weeks, the trade center bomb-  
ing was an incomplete act of terror-  
ism because it lacked a political mes-  
sage. But on March 28 the New York  
Times published a letter it received  
four days after the bombing. The  
Times quoted a law enforcement  
source who said there was "incontri-

THE WASHINGTON POST